



Apart from wanting to end to his lean patch, Mushfiqur Rahim will be hoping to be the first Bangladesh batter to reach the five thousand-run milestone in Tests during Bangladesh's first Test against Sri Lanka, starting from today at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram. Mushfiqur, however, is not the only one in pursuit of the feat as another stalwart in Tamim Iqbal is also on the verge of achieving it. [Inset] Meanwhile, with rain in forecast for most part of the five-day encounter, Shakib Al Hasan and Bangladesh pace bowling coach Allan Donald yesterday were seemingly worried about the weather as they pointed towards the cloud covering during practice.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Lankans planning 'out of the box'

SPORTS REPORTER, from Chattogram

Troubles had escalated at home but Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne appeared fully aware of the challenges at hand, a day before his side take on Bangladesh in the first Test in Chattogram today.

While his counterpart Mominul Haque was looking to take things a day at a time, Karunaratne knew his side have the edge even in Bangladesh conditions. Sri Lanka are yet to lose to the Tigers in Bangladesh in the red-ball format, but Karunaratne believes that their experience on Chattogram surfaces can help them bring a result into the question on what, in all likelihood, will be a flat deck. While there would be more of the same approach from batters, the bowlers will have to come up with something different.

"Similar conditions here, so we know how it's going to be in these tracks. It's a flat wicket here in Chittagong, so we have to score big runs to put pressure on the opposition," said Karunaratne.

"If you look at the last Test here, there were thousands of runs scored. So, it seems a pretty flat wicket. When you do the homework right, we can make some change here. If we can do that, we can go to Dhaka on a winning note."

Plenty of runs were scored the last time Sri Lanka played here. The Lankans identified that they may need to force a result here in order to give themselves a chance to seal or at least draw the series in Dhaka. Taking 20 wickets would be the toughest job.

"It's not easy. You have to work hard. Flat wicket will not give that much to the bowlers but if you are smart enough then you can take wickets here," he said.

While Bangladesh may look to keep things simple and wait for Sri Lanka to commit errors, the Lankans want to do something out of the box in order to give themselves the best chance.

"If there is not much in the wicket, then we have to think and try something out of the box. That's what we are planning for this kind of wicket. Let's see. We think we can do much better than the previous years."

Meanwhile, having returned negative on Covid test, ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan got back to the side after he had been ruled out of the series on Tuesday. Karunaratne said they already had devised their plans thinking Shakib will play.

"When we came here, we knew the Bangladesh squad and Shakib was there. We knew he would play and we took preparations accordingly. If he could not play that might be an advantage for us but there is no sudden change of plans for us at the moment."



## Tigers focus to flip fortunes at home

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI FROM CHATTOGRAM

Shakib Al Hasan and a few others raised a hand in the air directed towards the sky during the practice session yesterday, pointing out the rain clouds but by then the cloud of Shakib's unavailability had left the side.

Bangladesh team had been waiting on the wings for a decision on Shakib's availability for the first Test today in Chattogram. Earlier, the all-rounder was ruled out of the first Test after returning home from the USA, having tested positive for Covid-19. Under dramatic circumstances, Shakib twice underwent tests on his own accord on Thursday and returned negative for the virus before he underwent another test at a BCB-affiliated facility on Friday to get another negative test before joining the side on Friday night.

Shakib took part in yesterday's optional practice session for the Tigers and batted at the nets for a while. He looked a little jittery and perhaps opted for a few big shots to get himself going after returning to cricket for the first time since appearing in the recently-concluded Dhaka Premier League for Legends of Rupganj. He took on the spinners, went for a few uppish drives over mid-off and although rain had interrupted proceedings, Shakib might have felt he had enough of an outing with the bat to get ready for the first Test. Later at a press conference, captain Mominul Haque confirmed that Shakib will be playing.

Mominul will be looking to turn the tides of their recent record at home, having lost all of the previous three Tests in Chattogram. The bitter defeat against Afghanistan in 2019 was followed by the embarrassment against West Indies in 2020 before they capitulated to Pakistan's Hasan Ali and Shaheen Shah Afridi in the last Test played here in 2021.

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**The past four years' home record is dismal and gives an idea of Bangladesh's struggles of taking advantage of home conditions. During this period, Bangladesh's home record in 12 matches stands at four wins, seven losses and a draw. Two wins apiece came against Zimbabwe and the West Indies while the defeats came against Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, Pakistan and West Indies.**



of home conditions. During this period, Bangladesh's home record in 12 matches stands at four wins, seven losses and a draw. Two wins apiece came against Zimbabwe and the West Indies while the defeats came against Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, Pakistan and West Indies. Spin or pace, the Tigers' batters have been unable to apply themselves over Tests in both innings.

Asked if they are looking to change the curve, Mominul said: "Of course, we play to win and we have the same plan. We aren't thinking of what happened before."

The wicket will be in focus but there are suggestions that it will be pretty flat. Mominul agreed that the demands from the bowlers will be more than usual but could not ignore the recent batting debacles.

He urged that his side wanted to dominate proceedings. "We are focusing on how we will play over five days and dominate. Instead of thinking of all five days, we will take it one day at a time."

"Batters want to overcome in every series and we are working on these things. We're not thinking of what happened in the previous series. The conditions are very different and what's important is how we can adapt here. What's important is how we can use the lessons from the previous series," the skipper said.

Shakib's inclusion will open up the option of five bowlers in the line-up. "Shakib bhai is mentally very strong. You can understand someone's fitness by watching their batting. I think he is a hundred per cent fit. We will decide whether we go with four or five bowlers after inspecting the pitch tomorrow morning. Shakib bhai's presence always gives us comfort in regards to team combination. We will decide tomorrow whether we pick three or two pacers."

In an attempt to change fortunes at home, Mominul and Co will have to dig deep but that Test aggression Mominul had talked about will also have to flow tactically.

## Winning is the best legacy for Pep

REUTERS, Manchester

Manchester City may appear to be a relentless winning-machine, but manager Pep Guardiola wants his side's legacy to be that their period of Premier League dominance was "fun" as the team close in on their sixth title.

City lead the standings on 89 points, three ahead of Liverpool with two games to play. Thanks to their superior goal difference, a win against West Ham United on Sunday would all but assure them of a second successive league triumph. Despite amassing eight trophies during his tenure, Guardiola, who has yet to extend his contract beyond 2023, wants his side to be remembered for their style of play and sense of joy.

"We have fun. That is the best legacy, when we are in something in our lives, doesn't matter if professional, you have fun," the Spaniard told a news conference on Friday.

"Football is nice because behind you is a lot of people, our fans. I want City fans to say in that period we were fun, we play good, this is the best legacy. Emotional, give something unique watching our games, that is the best reward."

City's title rivals Liverpool played the FA Cup final against Chelsea on Saturday and won't be in league action again until Tuesday against Southampton.

By then, City could be six points ahead but Guardiola was not taking a win at West Ham for granted.

"West Ham (have) done two extraordinary seasons, this season in the Europa League... An incredible season, so strong in all departments, set pieces, the quality upfront, with (Manuel) Lanzini, (Pablo) Fornals, (Jarrod) Bowen," he said.

"A top side, difficult, but we know how important it is to get three points. An incredible step to try and finish the job at home (in final game) with our people."



Poland's Iga Swiatek signs autographs after defeating Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka 6-2, 6-1 in the semifinal of the Rome Open in Rome on Saturday. The world number one took one hour and 16 minutes to claim her 27th win on the bounce, a tally last reached by Serena Williams in 2015.

PHOTO: AFP

## Lewandowski wants to leave Bayern

REUTERS, Wolfsburg

Bayern Munich striker Robert Lewandowski has informed the club's boss that he wants to leave and not extend his contract with the German champions, Bayern sports director Hasan Salihamidzic said on Saturday.

"I spoke with Lewa. In that discussion he informed me that he does not want to accept our offer to extend the contract and that he would like to leave the club," Salihamidzic told Sky Germany ahead of Bayern's final game of the Bundesliga season at VfL Wolfsburg.

"He said he wants to do something else. But our position has not changed. The fact is he has a contract to June 30, 2023."

The 33-year-old Pole joined in 2014 from Borussia Dortmund and has won the German league every year since then as well as the Champions League.